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ABSTRACT

Two research projects were conducted to assess the relationship between teachers' views on the acceptability of intervention strategies for dealing with behavior problems and their classroom use of such interventions. One study with student teachers (N=72) investigated acting-out and passive behavior problems and the acceptability of behavioral, humanistic, and pragmatic interventions. The second study conducted with regular education teachers (N=72) included the acting out behavior problem and the acceptability of the three interventions. The ratings of the interventions indicated that both student teachers and regular education teachers viewed the humanistic and behavioral approaches as being the most acceptable and the pragmatic approach as being the least acceptable. In terms of classroom use, there were significant positive correlations among acceptability ratings of the three intervention types and student teacher self-reported use of these three types of intervention. With regular education teachers, there was a significant positive correlation between the ratings of the behavioral intervention and self-reported use of behavioral interventions within the classroom. Neither the pragmatic nor the humanistic ratings correlated with self-reported classoom use for the regular education teachers. (Author/NB)

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Theoretical Orientations of Intervention Strategies and Perceived Acceptability

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Running Head: INTERVENTION ACCEPTABILITY

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Abstract

Two research projects were conducted to assess the relationship between acceptability of intervention strategies and classroom utilization. The initial study with student teachers investigated two types of behavior problems (acting out vs. passive) and the acceptability of three proposed interventions (behavioral, humanistic, and pragmatic). The second study conducted with regular education teachers only included the acting out behavior problem and the acceptability of the three proposed interventions. The ratings of the interventions indicated that the student teachers as well as the regular education teachers viewed the humanistic and behavioral approaches as being the most acceptable with the pragmatic approach(s) being rated as the least acceptable. In terms of classroom utilization there were significant positive correlations among acceptability ratings of the three intervention types and student teacher self-reported utilization of these three types of interventions. With regular education teachers there was a significant positive correlation between the ratings of the behavioral intervention and self-reported utilization of behavioral interventions within the classroom. However, neither the pragmatic or humanistic ratings correlated with self-reported classroom utilization for the regular education teachers.

Theoretical Orientations of Intervention Strategies and Perceived Acceptability

The past several years has seen an increasing emphasis being placed on consultation in the schools. One of the areas of interest has been teacher acceptability of proposed intervention strategies. As research has shown, the concept of acceptability is not a unitary concept, but rather a very complex and multifaceted concept. It has also been shown that there is not a simple linear relationship between effectiveness and acceptability (Kazdin, 1981). Some of the factors which influence the acceptability of an intervention strategy are teachers' perception of control, severity of the behavior problem exhibited, amount of teacher time required to implement the intervention, and the type of intervention proposed (Gutkin & Ajchenbaum, 1984; Gutkin, Singer, & Brown, 1980; Witt, Elliott, & Martens, 1984; Kazdin, 1981).

In studies by Witt et al. (1984) and Witt, Martens, and Elliott (1984) student teachers and regular teachers' perceptions of interventions were assessed in regard to time required to implement the intervention, positive vs. reductive interventions, and the severity of the behavior problem. Results indicated teacher time was a significant factor for both student teachers and regular education teachers. While intervention type (positive vs. negative) and case severity influenced student teachers' perceptions, these were not significant for regular education teachers.

Research dealing with the theoretical orientation of a proposed intervention has shown that this also influences acceptability. Perceptions of intervention acceptability vary as a function of theoretical orientation, terms used to describe the intervention, and what label is used to name the intervention (Woolfolk, Woolfolk, & Wilson, 1977; Kazdin & Cole, 1981; Witt, Moe, Gutkin, & Andrews, 1984). In the Witt, Moe, Gutkin and Andrews' (1984) study, regular education teachers evaluated the acceptability of a typically utilized intervention of staying in at recess. The theoretical rationale of the intervention was varied along three orientations: behavioral, humanistic and pragmatic. Their results indicated the pragmatic approach was regarded as more acceptable than either the behavioral or humanistic approach. The behavioral and humanistic orientations were not significantly different from one another.

In addition to perceived acceptability, research has often included a measure of whether the intervention would be one the subject might utilize in the classroom (Kazdin, 1980; Kazdin, French, & Sherick, 1981; Witt, Elliott, & Martens, 1984). However, little attention has been given to the actual utilization of various interventions and their perceived acceptability. Supposedly if an intervention were regarded as acceptable, it should be more frequently utilized in the classroom. There is a need to address the relationship between acceptability ratings and reported utilization in the classroom.

Method

This presentation reviewed two separate investigations on intervention acceptability with student teachers and regular

education teachers. Each subject was asked to review a written classroom behavior problem(s). In response to the behavior problem(s) three interventions were presented (behavior modification, humanistic, and pragmatic). The participants in the first study were 73 student teachers from a midwestern state university who took part in the study during their student teaching experience and at the end of their formal coursework.

The study with student teachers (Hall & Didier, 1987) investigated two types of behavior problems (acting out vs. passive), and the acceptability of three proposed interventions (behavioral, humanistic, and pragmatic). Student teachers rated each intervention utilizing the Intervention Rating Profile - 15 (IRP-15) developed by Witt and Martens (1984). The interventions were labeled only as Intervention I, II or III to reduce labeling bias.

After participants completed the first section of the form dealing with the two types of classroom behavior problems and the three types of interventions, they were asked to rate the three types of interventions in terms of frequency of utilization in regard to classroom behavior problems.

The second study with regular education teachers investigated only the acting out behavior problem. The participants in this study were 72 regular education teachers from two local education agencies. Also, the study compared the acceptability ratings and teacher reported utilization of the interventions. Teaching level (elementary, junior high, and high

school) was also assessed in regard to acceptability ratings for the regular education teachers.

The IRP-15 is a refinement of the Intervention Rating Profile (IRP) developed by Witt et al. (1984). The IRP is a 20 item scale designed specifically to assess teachers' perceptions of the acceptability of classroom interventions. A factor analysis with varimax rotation indicated that the IRP was composed of one primary factor (general acceptability) and four secondary factors (risk to child, teacher time, negative effects of intervention on other children, and amount of teacher skill required to implement the intervention). The reliability of the IRP was computed to be .91 (Witt & Martens, 1984). The initial version of the IRP underwent refinement and modification in order to simplify the factor structure. This alternate version was called the IRP-15 (7 items are from the original IRP scale and 8 items are new). The 15 items have factor loadings from .82 to .95 on a single factor which appears to reflect a general acceptability dimension as reported by Witt and Martens (1984). While the IRP-15 is a relatively new instrument, validity and reliability studies have been encouraging. Reliability of the IRP-15 was reported to be .98, and in the same study the IRP-15 correlated .86 with the evaluative dimension of the Semantic Differential (Witt & Martens, 1984).

Results

A repeated measures design was performed on the data from the student teachers to determine if there would be differences in the type of interventions utilized in regard to the type of behavior problem exhibited. Scores on the IRP-15 served as the

dependent variables, with type of behavior problem exhibited (active vs. passive) and intervention type (behavior modification, humanistic, and pragmatic) serving as the independent variables. Results indicated that there were multivariate effects attributable to the type of behavior problem exhibited [$F(1,71) = 31.206$, $p < .0001$], intervention type [$F(2, 143) = 83.176$, $p < .0001$], and the interaction between behavior problem exhibited and intervention type [$F(1,142) = 15.570$, $p < .0001$].

Scheffe tests were performed on the data to determine more precisely where the differences occurred in regard to the three intervention types. Results of the multiple comparison test indicated that the ratings for all three intervention types differed significantly from one another. The humanistic approach ($M = 147.94$) was rated as more acceptable than either the behavioral ($M = 123.49$) or pragmatic approach ($M = 96.01$), and the behavioral intervention was rated as being significantly more acceptable than the pragmatic approach.

The Scheffe multiple comparison test was then performed for the interaction effect of behavior problem exhibited and intervention type. Results indicated that the pragmatic approach for the active behavior problem ($M = 40.68$) was rated as least acceptable in comparison to the other approaches. There was not a significant difference in the pragmatic approach of the behavioral approach in regard to the passive behavior problem ($M = 55.33$ and $M = 60.78$ respectively). The behavioral approaches did not differ significantly from one another in regard to either

the passive or active behavior problems ($\underline{M}$ = 60.78 and $\underline{M}$ = 62.72 respectively). The humanistic approaches did not differ significantly in regard to either behavior problem ($\underline{M}$ = 72.11 active and $\underline{M}$ = 75.83 passive), but were significantly different from the other intervention types. The humanistic approaches were given the highest acceptability ratings on the IRP-15.

Next, Pearson correlations were computed between the acceptability scores on the IRP-15 and the reported utilization of the strategies in the classroom setting (behavior modification, humanistic, and pragmatic). Results indicated that there were significant correlations between the scores on the IRP-15 and the self-reported utilization of type of intervention strategy. Those subjects who rated a particular intervention as more acceptable on the IRP-15 also cited that particular intervention as being utilized more frequently in the classroom setting. This trend was noted for all three interventions: behavioral ($\underline{r}$ = .5656, $p < .0001$), pragmatic ($\underline{r}$ = .5020, $p < .0001$), and humanistic ($\underline{r}$ = .3412, $p < .003$). Also noted on the correlations was the likelihood that if a subject rated the behavioral or pragmatic approach high and also cited one of these as frequently utilized in the classroom, the subject was more likely to rate the humanistic approach low and cite it as being the least likely to be used intervention strategy in the classroom ($\underline{r}$ = -.3483, $p < .003$, and $\underline{r}$ = -.4122, $p < .0001$ respectively). The reverse trend was not significant, however.

For the second study with regular education teachers scores on the IRP-15 again served as the dependent variables with grade level (elementary, junior high, and high school) and

intervention type (behavior modification, humanistic, and pragmatic) serving as the independent variables.

A repeated measures analysis with the data from the regular education teachers indicated significant differences between the three different intervention types [$F(2,140) = 62.10$, $p < .0001$]. However, there were no statistically significant differences between grade levels or the interaction between grade level and intervention type [$F(2,140) = 1.40$, $p > ,05$; and $F(4,140) = .22$, $p > .05$ respectively).

Regular education teachers rated the humanistic approach highest in terms of acceptability ($M = 67.68$). The behavioral intervention received the next highest rating ($M = 63.56$), while the pragmatic approach was the least preferred ($M = 37.63$). Results of Scheffe' comparisons indicated the difference between the humanistic and pragmatic interventions was significant. Likewise, there was a significant difference between the behavioral and pragmatic interventions. However, the rating difference between the humanistic and behavioral approaches did not reach significance.

Results of Pearson correlation procedures performed on the percent of time teachers reported utilization of the different interventions and the intervention ratings on the IRP-15 showed a significant positive correlation between the reported utilization of the behavioral approach and the behavioral intervention rating ($r = .4055$, $p < .05$). There was not a significant correlation between reported utilization and the intervention ratings for either the pragmatic or humanistic approaches ($r = .0061$, p .479;

and r = .080, p = .251 respectively). Also there was a significant negative correlation between the reported utilization of the pragmatic approach and the behavioral intervention rating. (r = -.2329, p = .024).

Discussion

Results of the multivariate analysis in both studies indicated that the humanistic approach was rated as being the most acceptable, the behavioral approach was next, and the pragmatic approach was rated as being the least acceptable. The difference between the humanistic and behavioral interventions was significant only with student teachers. Regular education teachers also rated the humanistic approach as being the most acceptable, but the ratings between the humanistic and behavioral interventions were not significant. The pragmatic approach was rated as least acceptable in both studies and the ratings were significantly lower than either the humanistic or behavioral ratings. The pragmatic interventions were taken from Dreikurs, Grunwald, and Pepper (1971). The present studies were in opposition to the Witt et al. (1984) study where the pragmatic approach was rated as the most acceptable by regular education teachers. It should be noted that in the Witt et. al (1984) study the same intervention was utilized (staying in at recess) but the jargon was based on three different theoretical perspectives, while in the present study the interventions were varied according to theoretical rationale. In addition, the current studies did not label the interventions on the basis of theoretical orientation. This may have

influenced the results. Previous research has supported a labeling bias especially in regard to behavioral interventions (Woolfolk et al., 1977). However, this hypothesis is doubtful in light of the results in regard to ratings and self-reported classroom utilization.

It is also possible that the differences among these studies may be related to the teacher preparation program and/or the local education agency's emphasis on an intervention technique. If a particular theoretical orientation receives more emphasis, it is likely that this would influence a teacher's perception.

Surprisingly, differences among regular education teachers of the three grade levels were not significant, nor was there a significant interaction between grade level and intervention type. It should be noted that these results were based on one written case description of an acting out behavior problem for the regular education teachers. The problem was written in such a way that it could be perceived as being representative of a problem encountered at all teaching levels. Since the problem behavior was designed to be general, it may not have been as appropriate in determining grade level differences as a more specific grade level problem would have been. This hypothesis was supported by the comments of several teachers on the returned form. One form stated: "It would help to know if this is aimed primarily at elementary or secondary teachers. There are tremendous differences in problems and means of dealing with them." It may be that teachers from different grade levels do differ in their acceptability and utilization of intervention type depending on the problem(s) encountered.

Unlike the study with student teachers which showed a significant correlations between intervention acceptability ratings and self-reported intervention utilization in the classroom among all three intervention types, the study with regular education teachers showed only a positive correlation between behavioral intervention ratings and self-reported classroom utilization of the behavioral approach. There was not a significant correlation between acceptability ratings and self-reported classroom utilization for either the humanistic or pragmatic approach. It may be that the regular education teachers had a more limited knowledge of the humanistic or pragmatic approach as applied in the school setting than did the student teachers who had only recently completed their formal coursework. It might also indicate that once a teacher is in an actual classroom setting, he/she may have more difficulty differentiating among theoretical approaches. Lending support to these possibilities was a comment on one of the forms indicating that a teacher had mistakenly thought the pragmatic intervention represented a humanistic intervention. Research (Lambert, 1976) has suggested that teachers typically are aware of only one or two treatments for any particular problem. Knowing about a treatment and how to implement it properly may determine use more so than acceptability. The results strongly suggest that the rating of an intervention in regard to overall acceptability may not necessarily be a primary factor in the utilization of an intervention in the actual classroom setting.

Teachers do not necessarily utilize those interventions that are perceived as being high in acceptability.

Results of the study with regular education and student teachers also indicated a significant negative correlations between certain intervention ratings and the utilization of certain approachs in the classroom. In some instances teachers' perceptions of particular theoretical interventions may significantly influence their opinions of other interventions, and may even preclude the teachers' willingness to try to implement certain interventions.

Implications of the current studies suggest that when an intervention is suggested for classroom utilization, it cannot be assumed that the teacher has the knowledge/skills necessary to implement it effectively. While the teacher's acceptability of a particular intervention may be important in his/her willingness to try to implement a certain technique, equally important may be his/her expertise/knowledge of the procedures necessary to implement an intervention with integrity.

Certain limitations of the present studies also need to be noted. The independent variables are particular to the present studies and limit the extended validity. The results may also be specific to the particular behavior problem(s) described. Generalizations to other types of behavior problems is limited. Finally, the studies utilized a written case report and this may be quite different if compared to an actual classroom setting.

Intervention acceptability has proven to be a very complex concept. While a great deal of research has been conducted recently, much more is needed. Suggestions for further research

include ascertaining if differences in intervention acceptability do exist among grade levels by presenting behavior problems particular to each grade level with subsequent interventions for teachers to rate. Additional research could also focus on the relationship of teacher training, teacher knowledge/awareness of interventions, acceptability ratings, and classroom utilization of intervention strategies.

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